



of manhood appear—he discards the prefix “Master,” and assumes the prefix appointed for maturity. Nothing would insult a young man of twenty more than to call him by the immature title of “Master” instead of “Mr.” Yet a woman is not permitted by social usage to assume the title of “Mrs.” until she marries. She may be a woman of great intellect, of great responsibilities; she may be the bread-winner of the family; she may be the director, the soul, the spirit of widespread moral enterprises, but if she has not succeeded in getting a husband she is forced to retain the prefix given to schoolgirls.

In opposition to this injustice is the equal one of giving the title of “Mrs.” to any immature, foolish girl who succeeds in getting married. Much virtue in those three consonants—“Mrs.”—but why should their influence and dignity come only with a wedding ring? Is a woman imperfect, immature, unworthy of being “mistress” of herself until some man marries her? Is she to be regarded as a minor until she becomes a wife? Do not years and study and travel and joy and sorrow and experiences of all kinds perfect her as well as it does male humanity without the sacrament of matrimony?—Amelia E. Barr, in American Woman's Home Journal, Sunday, February 7.

THE suggestion made by Mrs. Barr that a woman should attain to the dignity of “Mrs.” on her majority, that this title should be the insignia of judgment and maturity rather than matrimony, meets with my hearty approval.

It is not a trivial matter when considered in a thoughtful light, for it is one more manifestation of the desire of the woman of to-day to stand on an equal footing with men, and no onward step in woman's progress can be considered trivial.

If the title of “Mrs.” has a special dignity attached to it, it is the equal right of all women, as much as the title of “Mr.” is the inherent right of every grown man. That the subject is already unconsciously agitating the public mind is shown by the following incident:

In a communication sent recently to a maiden lady of years and great mental attainment by a famous judge, the letter began: “Miss Blank, Dear Madam,” thus combining the two titles and showing the insufficiency and inappropriateness of “Mrs.” as a title of maturity.

It is difficult to deal with the question of the “Disability of Miss” in a few words, for it overlaps many, if not all, the vital questions of woman's progress. The separate individuality of woman should be recognized long before she attains her majority. It should be cultivated in childhood and in girlhood. Every woman should be trained physically and mentally, too, to take care of herself, and she should no more depend upon man for her title of maturity than she should require his assistance over a muddy street or his protection on an isolated country road.

It is a strange feature of civilization, past and present, that the finest physical cultivation is always given to men who are seldom called upon to protect themselves. I do not mean that men should be less strong, less reasonably strong, but that women should be more strong. Perfect health is unquestionably the normal condition of women as well as of men.

I do not contend women are at present the equal of men either mentally or physically, but I do believe that they can be and will be after generations of culture such as men have had.

A famous lawyer has recently said, “Women always have been slaves and always will be, however much the condition is disguised in ease and luxury.” As a statement of facts in the past, this is true; as a prophecy of woman's future condition, it is absurd. The very discussion of the subject matter always proves that women are waking up.

The one clause in Mrs. Barr's article to which I do take exception is where she says that the title “Miss” is held “because a woman has not succeeded in getting a husband.”

There are various reasons why different women do not marry, but I am positive it is never because they could not if they wished to. I do not know, and never have known, a woman who has not had at least one opportunity to exchange the title of “Miss” for “Mrs.” It is not a question of “succeeding in getting a husband,” but of judgment in accepting the opportunities offered.

The important question is not that women should have every advantage offered men, or that men should have less, but merely that every human being should be afforded not only the best, but equal opportunities for culture and advancement, both mental and physical. MRS. H. M. SANDERS.

WITH regard to the particular demand made by Mrs. Barr that unmarried women may assume the title “Mrs.” it should be observed that words, like nations and families, have a history; have affinities and relationships which cannot easily be disturbed. Not infrequently the history of a word contains more valuable knowledge than the history of a campaign.

The words “Master,” “Mister” and “Mistress” have one common origin, and “Miss” is only a contraction of “Mistress.” (See Richardson's English Dictionary.) They are all derived from the Latin “Magister,” a double comparative of “Magnus.” They meant originally a superior, a conductor or conductress, a director or directress. They have not wholly lost their original meaning. Who has not heard a pert little miss of sixteen summers or less asserting emphatically, in one form or another, that she is her own mistress.

Little by little “Master” has been applied to boys, “Mr.” to adult males, the contraction “Miss” to those whom a Frenchman once described as “too old to be kissed, and not yet old enough,” and “Mrs.” to those who have been thought worthy by somebody to have the control of a household.

However desirable it may seem to give the title “Mrs.” more elasticity, the time required to introduce the change might be greater than we are will-

ing to allow. Perhaps an entirely new title would more quickly come into general use. The history of language shows that whenever a new word is needed somebody is ready to give it birth, as when a name is wanted for a newly discovered planet. The feminine equivalent of “magister” is “magistra.” For this the natural abbreviation would be “Mra.” Let Mrs. Barr adopt this new title in her next novel, give it to some such lovely character as her “Friend Olivia,” discuss its propriety and necessity for those who have passed beyond the Frenchman's limits to the word “Miss,” and it would bound into general use as if by magic.

Or, again, the word “Lady” might acquire a peculiar American usage. It is the feminine of lord. In England it is applied to the wife of a knight or baron, but as we have no such persons here the title might be given to any woman endowed with proprietary rights or authority. Why not use it merely as the feminine of lord as it is, with no more reference to marriage in one case than in the other?

Possibly the object desired might be still better secured by some modification of female costume. The Mohammedans have a law founded on a passage in the Koran, and made in the interests of social morality, that women past the age of childhood shall veil the lower part of their faces, especially in the presence of men.

Or, better still, the “Miss” and “Mrs.” might be distinguished by the manner of dressing the hair, “which is the glory of woman.”—I. Cor., xl, 15. Or, according to the French translation, “C'est une gloire pour la femme d'en porter.” The “Miss” might wear her hair loose and flowing, or plaited in braids, and the “Mrs.” in any “prevailing style,” provided it did not detract from her “glory.”

Whatever expedient we may adopt, it is not the “view” of one but of many men, and those of the better class, that too much honor cannot be bestowed on those noble women who bear through life only the names their mothers gave them. Often in family, in society and in church, their virtues, their prudence, their self-abnegation and their heroism make them the objects of general admiration and of sweet affection. What should we do without them? They are indispensable.

A distinguished pastor of the olden time used to pray most fervently not only for families but for “those who live in involuntary celibacy.” When such retain the sweetness of womanhood no titles can be half honorable enough.

DR. DICKERMAN.

THERE are very few honest and earnest women who will not, theoretically at least, admit the force of every argument in favor of the use of the term “Mistress” for all women entitled, either by age, attainment or character, to drop a prefix that manifestly belongs to immaturity alone.

Against the various reasons assigned for a change of this sort there can be no valid objection. All the evidence and logic concerning the subject are on one side. They have been already so well presented in these columns that they need no repetition.

As to the inherent justice of the change, there can be no question. No remark in connection with it is truer than the following, that “it means a great deal more than appears upon the surface.” And yet we can hardly hope that the average woman is going to look very much beyond the surface, or to discover the new dignity, or to make a new estimate of character and attainment.

The real obstacle to a ready reception of the idea of such a change will lie in the indifference and conversation of women themselves. If women could be brought to consider questions on their merits only, without reference to the anticipated opinions of people, we should have taken the first requisite step toward the consideration of a problem like this. What we need is honestly to think out the question. When enough women have fully settled in their own minds that this is one of the questions of sufficient importance to require their action, as well as their thought, they will be ready to unite and form a nucleus for right sentiment. This point attained, they will become investigators, and will be able to bulwark their sentiments with an array of facts showing the evil results of the present custom.

If they go one step further, and will project their minds into the future and will set in array the blessings and advantages that will come from the change, why, they have just so many more weapons in their armory. They will then be prepared to do battle for the new title by land or sea.

To many drowsy and indifferent women the victory may not be worth the struggle, but, nevertheless, the point must be recognized as an important outpost, which, once conquered, leaves many a vital point easier of attack in that slow but sure advance by which women are moving forward, not only in “whatsoever things are pure and whatsoever things are of good report,” but in whatsoever things are just and whatsoever things are true.

MARY LOWE DICKERSON.

MRS. AMELIA E. BARR, who has won such an enviable distinction in the world of literature as to render any opinion she may advance upon social questions of more than ordinary importance, contends that the prefix of “Miss” or “Mrs.” to the names of women only recognizes two great divisions—the married and the unmarried—and that the division is a matter of injustice, the woman of high mental, business and social standing of whatever age being ranked with the school girl.

There does seem a certain amount of injustice in this departure from the custom of the last century, where the term “Miss” was applied to girls under ten years of age, and the prefix “Mistress” given to grown-up unmarried women, though their mothers were living. The word “Mistress” has now two distinct applications, the abbreviation “Mrs.” being applied solely to married women, while that of “Mistress” is or might logically be used in connection with any woman, married or unmarried, who is well skilled in anything, whether in literature, business or any of the duties of life.

There is a dignity in the term “Mistress” beyond that of “Miss,” and more fitting to those who have passed their teens into the more fully matured woman, as there is in the term “Madam” from its synonyme “Mistress,” or “Mrs.” the latter simply indicating the married state, while the other recognizes the dignity of mature years. EGBERT GUERNSEY, M. D.